THE CONCEPT "COMPLAINT" IN ENGLISH
SOCIO-CULTURAL DISCOURSE

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L inguistic interaction is necessarily a social interaction. We communicate factual information, ideas as well as beliefs, emotions and attitudes or any other socially meaningful content in our everyday interaction. We construct, establish and maintain social relationship within various social contexts by performing speech activities and employing appropriate language means to ensure harmonious interpersonal relations and cooperation. One important socio-cultural aspect which speakers convey is that of **complaining**, which can be expressed using various linguistic as well as non-linguistic strategies. Each culture has developed various linguistic means to mark the complaining intentions of the speaker and has its own understanding of what constitutes complaining and socially appropriate behavior determined by culture.

The aim of the paper is to define specific features for the **complaint** production in verbal communication covering different social and cultural classes.

Discourse, its origin and different approaches to discourse, give the theoretical basis of speech acts. In the social sciences, a discourse is considered to be an institutionalized way of thinking that can be manifested through language, a social boundary defining what can be said about a specific topic, or, as the limits of acceptable speech. In other words, the chosen discourse delivers the vocabulary, expressions and, perhaps, also the style needed to communicate. Specific instances of language use (including a linguistic message, an utterance, a piece of discourse), which take place between particular people (speaker and addressee = interlocutors), at a specific time and place, in a particular social and cultural context, using (a) particular language(s), with a specific means of communication are originally called "communicative events" (Hymes 1972), but the term, "speech events" has become more common. Quite simply, speech events are structured activities that are governed by rules or norms for the use of speech.

Generalizing over speech events, Hymes abstracts-**addressor** and **addressee** (or audience), **topic**, **setting** (place and time), **channel** (how contact between the participants in the event is being maintained-by speech, writing, signing, smoke signals), **code** (what language or dialect or style of language is being used), **message-form** (what form is intended-chat, debate, sermon, etc) and **event** (the nature of the communicative event within which a genre may be embedded). Later Hymes adds other features: **key** (evaluation) and **purpose**. He suggests that the analyst may choose from the contextual features, those necessary to characterize a particular communicative event. Thus, a speech event is a combination of individual speech acts that, when produced together, comprise a complete speech act (Murphy and Neu 1996).

In the speech event of **complaining** the speaker expresses displeasure or annoyance as a reaction to a past or going action, the consequences of which are perceived by the speaker as affecting him/her unfavorably.

The functions of complaints can be:

1. To express displeasure, disapproval, annoyance, blame, censure, threats, or reprimand as a reaction to a perceived offense/violation of social rules (Olshtain & Weinbach 1993).

2. To hold the hearer accountable for the offensive action and possibly suggest/request a repair (Olshtain & Weinbach 1993).

3. To confront a problem with an intention to improve the situation (Brown & Levinson 1987).

4. To share a specific negative evaluation, obtain agreement, and establish a common bond between the speaker and addressee ("trouble sharing") (Boxer 1993a).

5. To allow ourselves to vent/let off steam (Boxer 1993a).

6. To open and sustain conversations (Boxer 1993a).

A complaint is an expressive speech act that can be expressed *directly* or *indirectly*. In a direct complaint a speaker expresses displeasure or annoyance as a result of a past or ongoing action that affects him/her unfavorably. An indirect complaint is defined as "the expression of dissatisfaction to an interlocutor about oneself or someone/something that is not present" (Boxer 1993a:219). When the speaker makes direct complaints, he/she is more likely to threat the hearer's face, or hurt his/her feelings and, hence, impair the relationship between them. According to Sauer (2001), speakers may tend to use a variety of linguistic forms and nonverbal signals in order to save the hearer's face and remain polite even when performing the inherently face-threatening act.

Although the strategies used to express a complaint may vary with the situation and among languages, complaints are generally realized by means of the following strategies proposed by Olshtain & Weinbach: (1993) *below the level of reproach* (the speaker avoids explicit mention of the offensive event by means of various remarks without directly blaming the interlocutor), *expression of annoyance or disapproval* (these are realizations of disapproval by means of indirect or vague indications that something has been violated without holding the interlocutor directly responsible, *explicit complaint* (the speaker explicitly states a direct complaint holding the interlocutor responsible for such a violation), a*ccusation and warning* (the direct action taken by the speaker making an explicit complaint carries potential consequences for the interlocutor).

There are certain strategies for producing **direct** complaints: **explanation of purpose/warning for the forthcoming complaint, complaint, request for solution/repair, request for non-recurrence**. **Indirect** complaints also have boundaries and consist of distinctive parts. In his study of hedges and indirect complaints in the trouble – talk narrative Ouellette (2001) determined that trouble – talk narrative incorporates elements identical to those identified by Labov, specifically, *abstract, orientation, complications, evaluation, resolution* and *code.* Each of these elements has a communicative function: *abstract* summarizes the story, *orientation* sets the stage and identifies the participants, *complications* chart the details of what happened, *evaluation* reflects the speaker's attitude towards the story, *resolution* outlines how the problem that evoked the speaker's complaints could be solved or treated in future and *code* signals the end of the indirect complaint sequence (Labov 1972).

During the interaction the speaker and the hearer are considered to share a common code of behavioral norms. Sticking to direct speech act of complaint the **severity scale** of complaints in different scenarios can be: 1. **Least severe -** the speaker actually avoids mentioning the offensive event, e.g. *Oh dear, tomorrow is Sunday but our*

work is still incomplete; 2. **Somewhat severe -** neither the offense nor the complainee but general annoyance at the violation is explicitly mentioned, e. g. *Never mind. No harm done. There's no real damage;* 3. **Fairly severe -** the speaker threatens the complainee's face by making a direct complaint but does not say there will be any other consequences, e.g. **Y***ou must try to review your behavior;* 4. **Severe -** the speaker explicitly accuses the complainee of the offense directly and hints that there may be consequences for the offender, e. g. *There's no excuse for doing it, John. Don't you know that you must obey our rules?* 5. **Very severe -** the speaker immediately threatens the complainee by attacking him/her. This last scale can often be introduced with the use of upgraders (*quite, terrible, frightfully, absolutely, I'm certain, It's quite obvious, etc.*) aiming at increasing the impact of complaint, e.g. *I'm absolutely sure you are lying to me right now.*

Colossal importance is attached to the phenomenon of **politeness** since owing to this strategy we can diminish the **face-threatening act**. The concept of this exists both in **direct** and **indirect** complaints the aim being to prevent the breach of relationship among interactants. There are certain characteristics for the strategy, i.e. *the use of the personal pronoun we*-to indicate that both parties share the blame and as a way of negotiating the problem; *the use of questioning, mostly with an illocutionary function of a request:* **What if…?,** *starting with the modals such as* **May I…? Would you mind…? Could you…?;** *the use of mitigators ("downgraders")* to soften the complaint - **perhaps, I suppose, I mean, I have to object…, It's a pity but…, I can't share your** …etc.; *the application of the modals* **need, must,** and *the conjunction* **but**, in **declarative** and **imperative sentence-types** with the illocutionary force of disapproval, disagreement, protest and dissatisfaction. To be polite one usually "breaks direct complaints gently" by using expressions like these before one actually comes to the point: **I wonder if you could help me…, I'm sorry to trouble you, but…, you see…, I'm sorry to have to say this, but I'd like to point out that…,** etc.

It is essential to state that one can witness the presence or absence of this or that **scale of severity** due to different factors, among them: **context features, gender, age, social relationship**, **degree of intimacy, etc**.

1. Head – Subordinate

(Addressor – employer, age 40, male; Addressee – employee, age 25, female; Setting-center of repairing computers, February 25, 2010; Style-formal:

> Addressor: *"I've already been waiting three weeks for the computer, and I was told it would be   delivered within a week."*
> Addressee: *"I'm sorry." "It's all my fault." "It will never happen again."*
> Addressor: *"All right, I forgive you, but next time you'll be dismissed."*
> Addressee: *"Thank you, I am very obliged to you. I promise to be accurate."*

Here we have the absence of the strategy of warning for the forthcoming complaint. Instead, we have all the other strategies (complaint, request for solution, and request for non-recurrence), the severity scale is that of fairly severe, the relationship is: head and subordinate, which is the major reason of the addressor's conveyance of urgency and com-

plaint with no softener and with no depersonalization, quite easily risking a breach of relationship.

2. Subordinate - Head

Addressor – an actor, male; Addressee – the manager, male
(Th. Dreiser "Sister Carrie" p.488).

Addressor: ***"I am not going to have my work cut up by some one else. Either she quits that when I do my turn or I quit."***

Addressee: *"Why that all right." "That's what she's supposed to do. You needn't pay any attention to that."*

Addressor: ***"But she ruins my work."***

Addressee: *"No, she doesn't. It's only a little fun on the side."*

Addressor: *"Is it?"* ***"She killed my hand all right. I'm not going to stand that."***

Addressor: *"Well, wait until after the show. Wait until tomorrow. We'll see what we can do."*

In this example the addressor complains to his manager about another actor. The severity scale is that of severe. We have the presence of the direct complaint strategy, the function is that of accusation.

The situation is somewhat different when dealing with the informal (conversational) style. Here first and foremost, we focus on the choice of the vocabulary that best reflects our psychological state. We can witness colloquialisms, jargon, a good deal of generalized vocabulary (***a lot of, thing, stuff, things like that, etc.***), simple sentences, a large number of prefabricated "fillers" (***well, I think, you know, sure, etc.***), exclamations, yelling, cries, use of upgraders (***terribly, absolutely, such, etc.***), lack of mitigators (***you know, I'm sorry, etc.***), a distinct structure of syntax *(**incomplete sentences, oftentimes sequences of phrases, little subordination, active declarative forms)*** certain intonation patterns (***stress, rising-falling-rising tone, etc.***), no temporal markers, no logical connectors and politeness markers.

3. Family members

Addressor – Daisy, the wife, Addressee – her husband Tom; Code – informal style.

Addressor: *"Look!"* ***she complained**, "I hurt it."* We all looked – the knuckle was black and blue. *"You did it, Tom," she sad **accusingly**. "I know you didn't mean to, but you did do it. That's what I get for marrying a brute of a man, a great, big, hulking physical specimen of a…"*

Addressee: *"I hate that word hulking", **objected Tom crossly**, "even in kidding."* (F. Scott Fitzgerald "The Great Gatsby" p.13).

In the above mentioned example the wife directly complains of her husband. The severity scale is that of fairly severe. We have incomplete sentences, and there are no softeners or politeness strategies. The choice of vocabulary is meant to express negative emotions. All these features are typical of the conversational (informal) style.

In the "*Living Language*" (p. 222), G. Keith and J. Shuttleworth record that:

women - talk too much, talk more than men, are more polite, are indecisive/hesitant, **complain and nag**, ask more questions, support each other, are more co-operative,

men - swear more, don't talk about emotions, talk about sport more, talk about women and machines in the same way, insult each other frequently, are competitive in conversation, dominate conversation, speak with more authority, give more commands, interrupt more.

4. Female – Male

The following dialogue best illustrates the relationship between a husband and a wife:

> W.: *Oh, Max, I am quite off my feet and you sitting comfortably in your armchair and watching that damned telly!*
> H.: *And what do you expect me to do?*
> W.: *What to do? The house is going to rack and ruin and you ask me such a silly question!*
> H.: *Well, well, don't exaggerate! What's amiss?*
> W.: *I was only trying to drive home my point that it is shameless of you to idle your time away when there are so many things to be done about the house.*
> H.: *Well, what's eating you? Have you got out of bed on the wrong side? Can't a man have a moment's rest after a busy day?*
> W.: *You may turn a deaf ear to me, but you know that I am right. And it's no use looking daggers at me. You very well know that I'm right.*
> H.: *Oh, what has come over you? When I courted you I thought you the most sweet- natured girl I ever met.*
> W.: *Don't start being rude again! You married with your eyes open so you have no ground to grumble now.*
> H.: *Great Scott! There are three occasions when a fellow can't make head or tail of a woman: that's first, last and all the time!*
> W.: *It's for me to complain. If I were to begin my life anew, I wouldn't have you if you were worth your weight in gold. There you are!*
>   (Vasileva & Kitenko "Look, Laugh and Learn to Speak" p.4-5).

In this dialogue the severity scale is that of fairly severe. There are no strategies and politeness markers, only a list of complaining. The function of complaint is that of expressing displeasure, disapproval, annoyance, blame.

As complaints stand out for two main aims - **destructive** and **constructive**, we can state that the aim of direct complaints is destructive while the main purpose of indirect complaints is constructive, i.e., to establish good terms with the interlocutor. Indirect complaints are employed for opening and sustaining conversations and begin with an introductory expression: **It's unfair..., I can't stand..., It's a shame…, This is not my day!, It drives me crazy!** and the like.

To sum, in different settings, channels of conversation the members of the semantic field of **complaint** can have different applications of usage depending on the reasons, aims, manner of complaint, social-cultural identity, social relationship, gender and age

peculiarities, severity scale and strategies of complaint. Complaints differ in their types, functions, and linguistic manifestations, too, thus providing a fertile ground for further studies.

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«Բողոք» հասկացույթը անգլերեն սոցիալ-մշակույթային խոսույթում

Հոդվածում ուսումնասիրվում է սոցիալական վարքի կողմնորոշիչներից մեկի՝ «բողոք» հասկացույթի առանձնահատկություններն անգլերեն սոցիալ- մշակույթային խոսույթում: Վերլուծվում են բողոքի տեսակները և գործառույթները, լեզվական արտահայտության ձևերը և ուժգնության սանդղակը, որն անմիջականորեն կախված է համատեքստից, խոսակիցների սեռից, տարիքից, սոցիալական դիրքից, մտերմության աստիճանից և այլ գործոններից:

Концепт "жалоба" в английском социо-культурном дискурсе

Целью данной статьи является выделение отличительных черт одного из ориентиров социального поведения, концепта "жалоба" в английском социо-культурном дискурсе. Определяются виды и функции жалоб, их языковые выражения и шкала строгости, на которую влияет контекст, пол, возраст, социальное положение, степень близости коммуникантов и другие факторы.